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TO BHMA
International edition

Including articles from
FINANCIAL TIMES
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

TO BHMA International edition

Greek Music Breaks New Ground at WOMEX

By Maria Paravantes

LAS PALMAS, GRAND CANARIA – Greece may be a small country of some 10.3 million people, but its music has traveled the world. Or should I say, some of its music.

In 1961, Manos Hadjidakis won an Academy Award for "Never on a Sunday". Twenty-one years later, Vangelis clinched an Oscar for "Chariots of Fire". And who doesn't know singers Nana Mouskouri and Vicky Leandros?

But if there is one song everyone the world over associates with Greece, it is Mikis Theodorakis' iconic "Zorba's Dance", composed in 1964.

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TO BHMA International edition

Yiannis Kottis' Mother's Stuffed Vegetables Changed His Painting

By Panos Kougias

"I want something that isn't trees again," I tell him when we get to the photographs that will accompany our interview. Taking a look at the works around him, Yiannis Kottis suggests the olive trees, then a different painting. And just when I think we've agreed, he adds: "You could put a tree in, too, if you want." It was likely naive of me to visit his studio and ask to leave the trees out.

I had arrived under the impression that I knew his painting, yet I struggled even to describe the surface of his works.

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NATHAN HOWARD/REUTERS

Supporters greet Democratic candidate for US Senate from Kansas Adam Hamilton following his election victory at a Marriott hotel in Overland Park, Kansas, US, November 3, 2026.

Trump Probes and Policy Fights: Here Is Democrats' New Agenda

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By Richard Rubin and Lindsay Wise

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WASHINGTON—Democrats captured control of the House and Senate in Tuesday's election with a sweeping national wave that ousted dozens of Republicans. What will they do now?

President Trump will still have a veto pen for the next two years, limiting Democrats' ability to enact laws that reverse his policies and setting up clashes that could be even more intense than the conflicts between Trump and Democrats when they controlled the House in 2019 and 2020.

But Democrats enter the new Congress with extraordinary momentum and Republicans reeling after surprise losses.

"This is a change election, and we understand as House Democrats that we need to deliver dramatic change," House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D., N.Y.) said late Tuesday. "Things are broken. We need a Congress that puts the American people first." The new configuration of government—with Jeffries poised to become House speaker and Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) set to be promoted back to Senate majority leader—will give Democrats a chance to make some points and show voters what they would pursue if their party gained full control of the government in the 2028 election.

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TO BHMA International edition

France and the Unfinished Promise of the Republic

By Kristina Tremonti

As student-led demonstrations over deteriorating educational conditions spread across France, drawing in trade unions and Yellow Vest protesters against a backdrop of mounting economic pressures and political fragmentation, they expose deeper divisions over inequality, national identity and the unfulfilled promises of the Republic.

To explore the deeper foundations of these tensions, *TO VIMA International Edition* spoke to Mary D. Lewis, the Robert Walton Goelet Professor of French History at Harvard University.

A historian of France's legal, political and social history, Lewis specializes in immigration, citizenship, colonial governance and the limits of republican universalism. Her award-winning book, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918–1940*, examines the unequal treatment of immigrants under French republicanism. Her second book, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938*, explores colonial power and competing systems of authority. Her current research examines the consequences of the Haitian Revolution for the rest of the French overseas empire.

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SARAH MEYSSONNIER/REUTERS

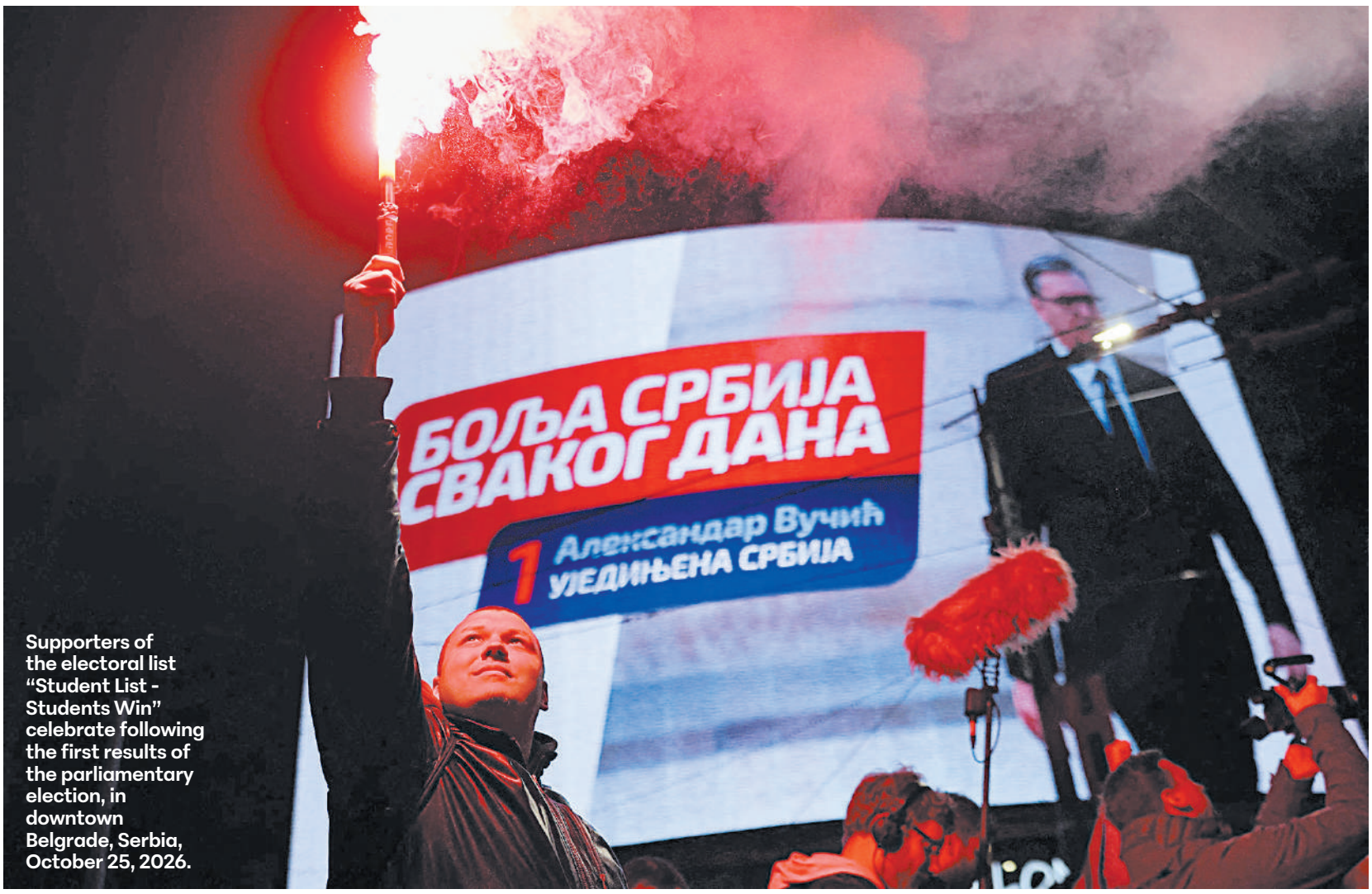
French high school and university students attend a demonstration in Paris as part of nationwide blockades and protests demanding better school conditions in France, November 3, 2026. The placard reads "The future is ours".



TO BHMA International edition

Serbia's Students Toppled the Regime. This Time, It Is Different.

What began as a demand for the institutions to function properly gradually became a demand for the removal of a government unwilling to meet the students' demands



Supporters of the electoral list "Student List - Students Win" celebrate following the first results of the parliamentary election, in downtown Belgrade, Serbia, October 25, 2026.

URO S ARSIC/REUTERS

By Dr. Dino Sakanović

When Aleksandar Vučić's regime fell on October 25, 2026, after the Student List's election victory, the scenes seemed familiar. They recalled October 5, 2000, when the Democratic Opposition of Serbia overthrew Slobodan Milošević. A dictator had been defeated and crowds celebrated, but hopes for a better future were soon dashed. This time, however, the circumstances are substantially different. Unlike Zoran Đinđić in 2000, the students have an opportunity to take power without depending on a coalition of competing political parties. They have won not as political party but as a democratic movement.

The movement began after the authorities failed to accept responsibility for the collapse of a canopy at Novi Sad railway station on November 1, 2024, which killed 16 people. Students demanded an investigation and accountability. When the authorities tried to suppress their commemorations, high-school students, citizens, academics, intellectuals and opposition parties joined them. Its distinctive feature was its horizontal organization: decisions were made through student plenums, without a single recognizable leader.

That leaderless structure made it difficult for Vučić's regime to discredit or control the movement. The authorities alternated between offers of dialogue, threats and violence, but failed to break the protests. What began as a demand for the institutions to function properly gradually became a demand for the removal of a government unwilling to meet the students' demands.

The days following the election have suggested that, unlike the opposition in 2000, the students had prepared for the possibility of governing. Respected figures such as academician Radomir Saičić and economist Dejan Šoškić have emerged as potential candidates for senior state positions. Crucially, they did not create or lead the movement; the students brought them forward as trusted figures. The movement has also announced a reform agenda, including changes to the police and prosecution service, the depoliticization of public institutions, education and media reforms, reviews of questionable contracts, and the continuation and acceleration of Serbia's EU accession negotiations.

There are already signs of change within state institutions. The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office has begun reviewing cases handled by public prosecutor's offices across the country. Editors of public media outlets associated with the former regime have started resigning, while police have detained members of the ruling party accused of attacking citizens celebrating the Student List's victory. Their significance will depend on whether they lead to lasting institutional change.

One of the movement's most consequential promises is lustration: removing officials appointed to state institutions primarily because of their loyalty to the former regime. Đinđić also proposed lustration after 2000, but lacked sufficient support within the governing coalition to implement it. The student movement, by contrast, has its own parliamentary majority and



MARKO DJURICA/REUTERS

Members of the electoral list "Student List - Students Win" celebrate following the first results of the parliamentary election in Belgrade, Serbia, October 25, 2026.

does not need to negotiate every major decision with coalition partners. Nor is it a conventional party to which politicians can easily defect in order to join the new majority.

Đinđić's coalition included liberals and nationalists whose disagreements obstructed reforms. Today, Serbia has a broader, if imperfect, consensus on major foreign-policy questions. There is no agreement on recognizing Kosovo's independence or imposing sanctions on Russia, but there is room for compromise on technical issues with Kosovo, neutrality towards Russia and broad support for continuing EU negotiations and implementing reforms. These issues are therefore less likely to divide the new authorities in the way that Kosovo, Russia and relations with the Hague Tribunal divided Đinđić and President Vojislav Koštunica.

The students' victory does not mean that the movement is free of contradictions. Its supporters are divided over questions of history and national identity. Some gatherings have been distinctly pro-European, while others have featured nationalist rhetoric and references to Kosovo. The movement's horizontal structure, which helped it unite diverse groups against the regime, may also make governing more difficult. Its parliamentary bloc could fracture when confronted with issues on which no pre-election consensus exists.

The challenge, therefore, will be to develop effective coordination and decision-making without allowing the movement to become a conventional party dominated by a single leader. An informal organization cannot govern indefinitely without institutional structures. The students will have to establish a democratic system through which the movement can operate within state institutions while preserving the participation and accountability that made it distinctive.

The students' opportunity may resemble that of another movement that took power in Serbia in 1945 more than that of the divided opposition in 2000: a chance to reshape institutions and society on a far-reaching scale. But an opportunity is not a guarantee. The students have achieved what many considered impossible by defeating an entrenched regime through peaceful, democratic mobilization and winning an election.

This time, Serbia has a different opportunity. It must not be wasted.

Serbia's Path to Change

1 NOV 2024
The Novi Sad tragedy
The railway-station canopy collapses, ultimately killing 16 people. Allegations of corruption and negligence trigger national outrage.

22 NOV 2024
The student movement
begins Students and professors are attacked during a memorial gathering i n Belgrade.

22 DEC 2024
First massive Belgrade demonstration
Around 100,000 protesters gather at Slavija Square, revealing the scale of public opposition.

28 JAN 2025
Prime Minister Miloš Vučević resigns
Following sustained protests and attacks on students, the prime minister steps down. Demonstrations continue.

15 MAR 2025
The largest protest
in Serbia's recent history An estimated 275,000–325,000 people gather in Belgrade, marking the peak of the initial mobilisation.

5 MAY 2025
Students demand snap parliamentary elections
A decisive shift: the movement moves beyond demands for accountability and explicitly challenges the ruling party's mandate.

28 JUN 2025
Vidovdan protest and confrontation
Around 140,000 people demonstrate in Belgrade. Students renew their election demands, followed by clashes and arrests.

9 SEP 2026
Vučić dissolves parliament and calls elections
Snap parliamentary elections are scheduled for 25 October, opening the way for the student-backed electoral list.

27 SEP 2026
President Aleksandar Vučić resigns
Vučić steps down as president to lead the SNS-backed electoral list and seek the premiership.

25 OCT 2026
Historic electoral victory for the Student List
Student List wins snap parliamentary elections; Vučić concedes defeat.

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Trump's slapdown by America is one for the ages

In multiple midterm races the president's heavy-handed input boomeranged

By Edward Luce



UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

US President Donald Trump arrives to deliver remarks, ahead of the midterm elections at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, after being reopened following months of repairs, in Washington, DC, US, November 2, 2026.

Tuesday night looks like the beginning of the end of Donald Trump. His response to what amounts to America's stinging personal midterm rebuke is likely to be volatile. Yet it is hard to see how he could claw his way back from such a strong Democratic wave having urged voters to act as though his name were on the ballot. Against advice, Trump turned the elections into a referendum on him. He thus owns the historic scale of the Republican defeat.

There were plenty of other losers on Tuesday night. Elon Musk, who pumped more than $200mn of his own money into the Texas Senate race, learnt that even historically large donations can't buy you love or results against so strong a public swing. His candidate, Ken Paxton, lost to Democratic nominee James Talarico, who was not even born the last time a Democrat won a Texas Senate seat. It was also a disastrous night for the once-powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which spent a lot of money trying to defeat Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan. El-Sayed is set to become the first Muslim senator in US history, having also got the majority of Michigan's early Jewish vote, according to exit polls.

It was also a terrible night for Vivek Ramaswamy, the bombastic Trump understudy, who was defeated in Ohio's gubernatorial race. He might now bow out from politics having spent a large chunk of his personal fortune on what was seen only a few months ago as a safe bet. Likewise, the late Lindsey Graham would be turning in his proverbial grave to watch his recently appointed sister, Darline Graham, lose his long-held South Carolina seat to a Democrat — the first time the party has won a Senate race there in almost 30 years. Many other landmarks will be passed in America's 2026 midterms in what early numbers suggest was a historically high turnout. America seems finally to have fallen out of Trump's spell.

In each race, Trump's heavy-handed input boomeranged. In a telephone interview with me an hour before the first polling stations closed, Trump said he had been energised by the enthusiasm he saw on his recent frenetic campaign schedule. Presidents normally strive to keep their name out of the headlines in midterm elections. Many avoid the hustings altogether. Trump covered the map with the energy of a far younger person yet seems only to have exacerbated his party's electoral quagmire.

Not only did Trump thrust himself into the centre of each news cycle; he went out of his way to belittle the electorate's chief concerns. Affordability was a "Dumocrat [sic] hoax", Trump insisted. Though the Iran war and its inflationary effects was a dominant theme, Trump told voters he had kept every promise. One of those was to avoid wars in the Middle East. Some believe that he showed clear signs of cognitive decline. "I've actually kept far more promises than I made," Trump cryptically suggested the day before the election.

Perhaps his most psychologically wayward choice was to deliver his big campaign closing speech in front of Washington's Lincoln Memorial reflecting pool — a Trump obsession that few Americans seem to share. In the annals of US political campaigning, no more bizarre closing argument can have been tried. The majority of Trump's one-hour election eve peroration was about the pool.

"The reflecting pool right now looks better than it ever looked," Trump said, having claimed that both Barack Obama and Joe Biden tried and failed to upgrade the water feature. "We're replacing all of the grass and all of the parks. Because like the human being, grass has a life also." Some members of Trump's White House staff watching it on television reportedly buried their faces in their hands as he spoke.

Democrats will now control both chambers of the US Congress in a result that even Trump might find "too big to rig". There are two immediate consequences. The first is that the Republican campaign to replace him as the 2028 nominee will begin straightaway. Indeed, Ron DeSantis, the outgoing governor of Florida, arguably kicked that off before the polls had even closed. Without naming Trump, he said no public official should make money from holding office. That suggests an anti-corruption backlash following an election where that theme topped many recent polls.

The second consequence is that Trump's unpredictability is likely to become an even larger feature of his presidency. To those who oppose him, Tuesday night was a lightning strike. But Trump is rarely outbid in the drama stakes. Whichever way he reacts, the 2026 result will change America's course. The 2018 Republican midterm defeat was the end of Trump's beginning, to borrow Churchill's phrase. This week's high turnout a decade after Trump descended that escalator spells the beginning of his end.

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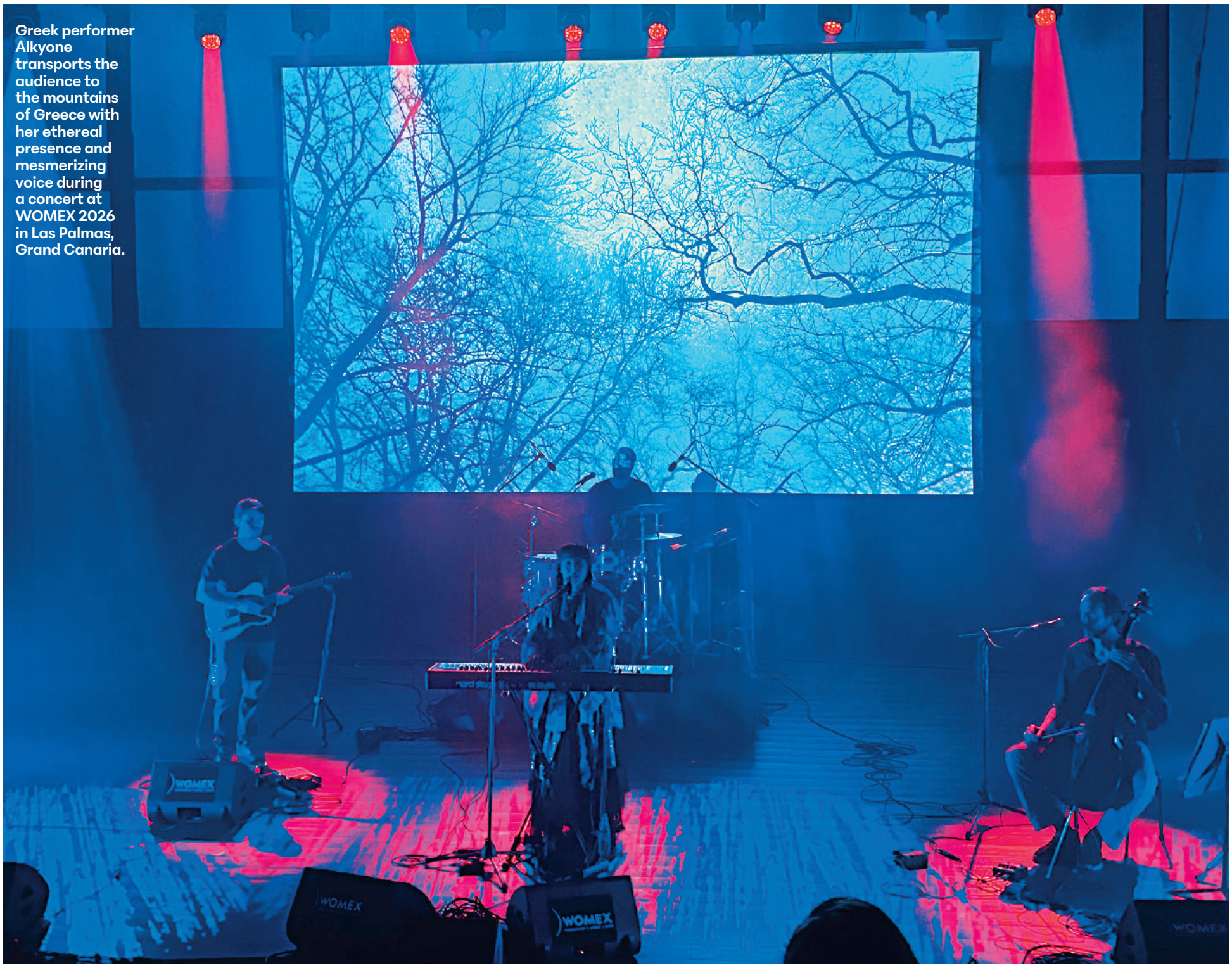
JEENAH MOON/REUTERS

Democrat candidates at a Democratic Election night party during the US midterm elections in Manhattan, New York City, US, November 3, 2026.

TO BHMA International edition

Beyond Zorba: Greek Music Breaks New Ground at WOMEX

A fresh generation of Greek musicians is looking beyond borders, confident that their music can resonate with audiences worldwide



Greek performer Alkyone transports the audience to the mountains of Greece with her ethereal presence and mesmerizing voice during a concert at WOMEX 2026 in Las Palmas, Grand Canaria.

MARIA PARVANTES

Continued from Page One

In the six decades since then, talented musicians, composers, and bands have produced an extraordinary wealth of music across all genres; music that remains mostly unknown outside Greek borders.

With that in mind, I headed to WOMEX, the largest international world music trade fair, held in Las Palmas, Spain on October 21-25. There, on the expo grounds, I stopped and asked dozens of delegates one simple question: "When you think of music from Greece, what comes to mind?"

The answer? Almost unanimously "Zorba!" Some did mention Nana Mouskouri, and a few old-timers remembered Demis Roussos.

One can only wonder why Greece—home to a thriving contemporary music scene and a broad spectrum of musical genres, many with roots in centuries-old traditions—has yet to tap into this precious cultural asset.

Greek acts dreaming big

Thanasis Zikas and Evi Seitanidou, the duo behind Greek indie-folk band Kadinelia, attended WOMEX for the first time this year. Zikas, a luthier who creates his own guitars, says the time felt right to take the next step professionally.

"Up until recently, Greeks rarely had their sights set on an international career. For many, it seemed unreachable and there was little understanding about how to get there," he tells *TO VIMA International Edition*.

"And Greek musicians never really cared about going abroad, because we are one of the few countries where traditional music is still very popular," adds Seitanidou.

The two artists founded the band almost a decade ago. "We felt we had something meaningful to say through our music," says Zikas. They initially performed reworked traditional songs on two guitars. And like many of their generation, they are very much connected to Greek folk music (demotika).

"It was passed down to us; it's our heritage," Zikas says. But he goes on to add that traditional music only provides the spark. "It's up to us to find the way to move forward. We need to express our era, our needs, our world; to create our own musical paths and traditions."

Over the last decade, Kadinelia have crafted a unique style of music: a genre-busting mix of Greek traditional sounds, electric blues, swing and rock 'n' roll enhanced with the earthy tones of Zikas' custom-made steel-string guitars, the primal drone of the tsabouna (the Greek bagpipe), the haunting lyre, and Seitandou's soulful vocals.

And it's true, Kadinelia's music is best experienced live.

"Our live shows are an experience," explains Seitanidou. "It's the explosive energy that you get during a live gig."

"And it's the energy and feedback we get back from the audiences that keeps us dedicated and passionate," Zikas adds.

The band has performed around the world, including in Australia, the UK and elsewhere in Europe. WOMEX, they say, is a step towards establishing a stronger presence abroad. This means forging the connections necessary to "show the world our treasures... and help our music reach a wider audience."

"Let's be honest," Seitanidou says, "airtime, concerts, bookings are all now a matter of networking. If a band or artist wants to make it internationally, there are specific moves they need to make."

Despite the challenges at home, they are both confident. "We know," Zikas says, "that our showcase here will open doors."

People out there finally need to know that there's a lot more to Greek music than the syrtaki, he adds.

The world we inherited

For 33-year-old singer-songwriter Alkyone, WOMEX and similar music festivals are a great way to meet fellow musicians and artists. "It's a gateway to the world," she says.

Born in Edessa, northern Greece, Maria Zlatani masterfully weaves the sounds of her birthplace into a romantic indie-folk style firmly anchored in Greek tradition.

Her stage name, Alkyone, which means 'nightingale', was inspired by a dream, she tells *TO VIMA International Edition*.

"In this dream, I fly over rivers and forests. I have always held a special love and admiration for birds and the sky; I often gaze at them, wondering how they perceive the world," she says.

"And then it occurred to me that it would be beautiful, every time I sing, to honor this realm of dreams, bringing it a little closer to the real world and reminding myself that it is crucial to dream—all the more so when our eyes are wide open."

And that's exactly the mood her music creates. During her offWOMEX concert, Alkyone transported the audience to the mountains of Greece with her ethereal presence and mesmerizing voice.

"Our music is where the world we inherited and the world we are trying to explore meet," she told the audience during her concert.

And that appears to be the trend not only in Greece, but all over the world. Delegates I spoke to from Ukraine, Latvia, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Canada, India, Madagascar and Nigeria all said they had turned to their traditional music for inspiration and a sense of identity, adding their own voice and crafting a new sound.

For Alkyone, her participation at WOMEX was much more than just the showcase.

"More than anything else, it offered me the opportunity to exchange musical ideas with others and to witness a different kind of world—a world that dedicates its entire existence to art and the ideas that surround it. This has given me a great sense of inner strength and a desire to strive even harder," she says.

Why was Greece's participation so important? Both Greek acts earned their spot in this year's WOMEX program. An international jury selected Kadinelia for participation in the coveted showcase program, and Alkyone was singled out for the off WOMEX series.

Even more importantly, both managed to pass the hardest test of all: to capture the attention of the audience and keep them engaged. This is no small feat at WOMEX, where delegates, usually bookers and music industry professionals, are running from one showcase to another in a frenzy to see it all.

Talent is not always enough

One thing is for sure, Greek artists attending this year's expo all agreed that going international is challenging and costly. Kadinelia and Alkyone cited Music from Greece, the country's government-recognized music export office, as playing a decisive role in their participation.



MARIA PARAVANTES

Greek band Kadinelia - Thanasis Zikas and Evi Seitanidou – delivered an explosive showcase at WOMEX 2026 that got the audience on their feet.



MARIA PARAVANTES

Enkele, a Colombian all-female band in action. Just one of the many showcase events during this year's WOMEX in Las Palmas, Grand Canaria.



MUSIC FROM GREECE

An impromptu 'Meet the Greeks' event at the national stand organized by Music from Greece under the auspices of the Culture Ministry.

Compared to other countries, Alkyone explains, Greece offers few avenues to seek the sponsorship needed to bring a project to life.

"If it weren't for Music from Greece and the effort they put into securing the sponsorship that allowed us to attend the festival, things would have turned out very differently," she explains.

"Engaging in any form of art in Greece is a challenge in itself—all the more so when it comes to covering the costs of presenting one's work at events like WOMEX."

"That's why efforts like Music from Greece are so encouraging: they have the potential to make a significant difference in the future and the opportunities available to many other artists," she explains.

Kadinelia agree. "They gave us the guidance and the know-how we needed to make our dream come true," said Zikas. But most of all, he adds, "it's the moral support and the nurturing."

Turning visibility into opportunity

Meanwhile, in the run-up to the showcases, the people of Music from Greece were busy talking, answering questions, meeting with producers and bookers at the Greek WOMEX stand, made possible with the support of the Greek Culture Ministry. They even held an impromptu "Meet the Greeks" event with live music, lots of wine and goodies from Greece.

This was Music from Greece's fourth consecutive year at WOMEX, and its first time coordinating the national stand and delegation.

"It's an important step towards giving Greek artists more consistent support in developing their international careers," Angeliki Spyridaki, founder and CEO of Music from Greece, tells *TO VIMA International Edition*.

But she's quick to point out that turning Greek artists' visibility into meaningful opportunities takes sustained work. This involves identifying the right festivals and markets for each artist, following up on professional contacts, and building relationships with partners who can open doors to new audiences. Not to mention the practical support the artists need, everything from professional representation to funding for travel and touring.

"Our priority is to help these connections develop into lasting collaborations. Ultimately, success means a performance that leads to the next invitation, and over time, an audience that keeps coming back."

TO BHMA International edition

France and the Unfinished Promise of the Republic

In an interview with *TO VIMA International Edition*, Harvard historian Mary D. Lewis examines the historical roots of France's social unrest, the contradictions of republican ideals and the growing divisions reshaping French society

Continued from Page One



STEPHANE MAHE/REUTERS

A protester holds a French national flag during a demonstration by French high school and university students in Nantes as part of nationwide blockades and protests demanding better school conditions in France, November 3, 2026.

What does it actually mean to be integrated into French society? Is the problem that certain communities have failed to integrate, as some political movements argue, or that French society has struggled to recognize them as fully belonging? And how does this contradiction relate to the historical limits of French republican universalism?

Lewis: If we look at the current student movement, there could hardly be a clearer sign of having fully assimilated the values of the French Republic than to demand the universal access to education that has long been central to its promise. Moreover, in organizing in student unions, and in organizing demonstrations, the students drew on longstanding repertoires of civic engagement in France.

The current movement among high school students in France is widespread and not unique to cities or neighborhoods with recent histories of immigration. Although the movement began in Créteil, an underprivileged suburb of Paris where a quarter of the population is foreign-born, and where material conditions in the school were particularly poor, it quickly spread to other high schools including in the heart of Paris. The movement includes students from many different classes and family backgrounds.

The 2026 movement is therefore different from the November 2005 unrest, which stemmed from longstanding frustrations over ethnic profiling of youth by police. Those youth, too, were French-born, sometimes even third-generation, but were tired of being treated as if they were second-class citizens.

We see a few echoes of 2005 in the current movement in clashes between police and youth, but there is hardly a high school in France that has not faced some of the problems the students have called attention to regarding teacher shortages, infrastructural degradation, and so on. It is a much broader youth movement.

The claim that suburban youth or "youth descended from immigration" (jeunes issus de l'immigration) engage in violent behavior because of some antipathy for France is a rhetorical strategy deployed for political purposes. In fact, most of the violence in these demonstrations has been perpetrated by so-called "casseurs" [breakers] or the "Black Bloc," anarchist-leaning opponents of the government. Their origins are varied, and include many whom one would not categorize as "issus de l'immigration." It is important to distinguish the casseurs and the Black Bloc from the original student movement.

Your research also explores the history of citizenship and national belonging. Parts of the political and media discourse have portrayed immigrants and Muslims as responsible for France's wider unrest. To what extent are these attitudes rooted in France's history?

In many ways, this is not a new struggle. The French Republic has always had many contradictions. The drafters of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaimed all men free and equal during the French Revolution without even contemplating women, let alone hundreds of thousands of enslaved people in France's colonies who did not benefit from those rights. Slaves were emancipated in 1794 but re-enslaved in 1802 and only freed again in 1848. That same year, Algeria was annexed as three supposedly "integral" departments of France. And yet, those departments sent members to parliament from the settler class, while the vast majority of its Muslim French nationals were not allowed to vote until after World War II, and even then could only do so through electoral colleges that filtered the impact of their vote. A French Jewish army intelligence officer—Alfred Dreyfus—was falsely accused of espionage in 1894 and exiled, while the upper echelons of the Third Republic military trumped up evidence to conceal the truth. In addition, Jews were scapegoated for both the economic depression and the war in 1930s France. Women only gained the vote in 1944. And even after Algerians were granted citizenship in 1946, they still had unequal voting rights, faced housing discrimination, and were subjected to curfews.



MINDA DE GUNZBURG CENTER FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mary D. Lewis, the Robert Walton Goelet Professor of French History at Harvard University.

I could go on, but I think the point is clear: Like any democracy with a history of slavery, colonialism, antisemitism, sexism, or other forms of exclusion, France's republic has seen its fair share of inequalities, and these have of course engendered frustrations on the part of the excluded. In a healthy democracy, such frustrations are debated by a free press and addressed—however imperfectly—by an elected legislature. What's concerning is when societal fissures contribute to the abandonment of democracy, as they did in 1940. Currently, what worries me is that there are politicians in France who are trying to deepen such fractures for electoral gain rather than solve their root causes. The scapegoating of others is often the first sign of a fraying commitment to democratic values.

France has experienced successive waves of unrest, from the Yellow Vests protesting fuel prices and economic hardship, to the uprisings in the suburbs over policing and discrimination, and now the student demonstrations over deteriorating educational conditions. Why has France struggled to translate these recurring expressions of anger into lasting political change?

France has a long, shared history of street politics which sometimes feature similar tactics or explicit references to one another. For instance, the movement this fall features memes first circulated as posters during the May 1968 movement, replacing the image of Charles De Gaulle with Emmanuel Macron. That said, while the current demonstrators share a deep dissatisfaction with Macron's leadership, they have different goals, motivations and visions of what they want from the state. This makes it very difficult for the government to respond to them.

Street politics are effective when they prompt the government to negotiate with what the French call "social partners" (unions and the like). When the antifascist Popular Front coalition won elections in May 1936, the massive demonstrations and factory occupations that ensued led to major labor-law reforms that reinforced the right to strike, shortened the working week to forty hours, and gave workers paid vacations for the first time. In May 1968, student demonstrations were joined by workers and led to advances for workers in the short term, as well as the lowering of the voting age and the diversification of television and radio stations, among other changes, in the longer term.

By contrast, we haven't seen such major negotiations emerge from more recent street politics. In 2018, when Macron proposed a fuel tax to support green energy initiatives, the Yellow Vest movement emerged, engaging in repeated weekly demonstrations, blocking automobile rotaries, and demanding lower fuel prices and a reinstatement of a wealth tax that Macron had eliminated.

Although Macron made some concessions to the group, he refused to reinstate the wealth tax, and the resurfacing of the Yellow Vests this fall as fuel prices spike suggests that their demands remain unmet. In 2023, when Emmanuel Macron proposed a change in the retirement age in France, demonstrations once again broke out. Instead of conceding or negotiating, the government resorted to a controversial constitutional maneuver that allowed the bill to pass without a vote from the National Assembly. Street politics have been an effective means of lobbying when they have forced governments to the negotiating table, as they did in 1936 and 1968; more recently, however, they have expressed anger but not effected lasting change.

It might have been prudent for the government to have met with the students in September, instead of letting a month pass while police responses exacerbated the conflict and inadvertently created space for instigators to take advantage of the stu-

dent movement and attack the state more broadly. But with Emmanuel Macron term-limited and the French parliament hung since his ill-fated snap election in 2024, and with a revolving door of prime ministers, the current government has shown little willingness to negotiate with the street. Also, while the students had a clear union organization that might have allowed for substantive talks between them and the government, there is no single group that represents all the different actors that are now involved. Moreover, it is exceedingly difficult to satisfy the budget-heavy demands of the students and the cost-of-living concerns of the Yellow Vests simultaneously, to say nothing of the anti-establishmentarianism of the anarchists.

France has historically built much of its republican identity around public education, social protection and the promise of equality. What happens when the state can no longer meet the expectations that underpin that social contract? Is France confronting a temporary fiscal crisis, or a more fundamental questioning of what citizens should be able to expect from the Republic?

I think this is a very important question.

When the republican school was created in the 1880s, the Third Republic mandated a school in every commune. This was a massive infrastructural undertaking, as well as a huge investment in salaries for teachers. Third Republic teachers were known as "hussars" of the republic and were charged with inculcating the French language and secular morality among a mostly Catholic population who often spoke regional dialects; of course, they also transformed the children of foreigners into French citizens. Education is one of the bedrock values of the republic, so the government will eventually have to figure out a way to address France's deteriorating educational infrastructure and personnel shortages, despite budget constraints.

Unfortunately, I don't think this is a temporary fiscal crisis. It is hard to know where to make cuts, or how to generate more revenue. Given the rise in life expectancy, Macron's idea of raising the retirement age was not irrational. However, retirement is regarded as a right, and so any further change to the retirement age, or to social rights more generally, will require a nimbler politician.



ANDRE CHUNG FOR WSJ

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries is poised to become speaker.

Trump Probes and Policy Fights: Here Is Democrats' New Agenda

Big victories in House and Senate set stage for major conflicts in final two years of president's term

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And they will have to negotiate with Trump and Republicans over must-pass items such as legislation to keep the government open and funded.

"Senate Republicans will not stand idly by as the far-left, socialist wing of the Democrat Party attempts to unwind everything we've done," Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R., S.D.) said. "Thankfully, we still have President Trump in the White House, and we'll work with him to stop the worst impulses of Democrat extremism."

Here is a quick look at some top Democratic priorities.

Unraveling parts of Trump's tax law

Republicans used their slim majorities to push through a major tax-and-spending law last year. All Democrats voted no on the "one big, beautiful bill," and they have vowed to try to reverse much of that legislation.

They will aim to undo changes to Medicaid that require recipients to work and are slated to take effect soon, as well as changes to nutrition-assistance policies that have contributed to a 13% reduction in food-stamp rolls. They also will try to revive Obamacare health-insurance subsidies that Democrats expanded during Joe Biden's presidency and that lapsed under Trump.

Democrats also might attempt to undo some of the tax cuts that Trump signed into law, particularly the ones that benefited high-income households and corporations.

Investigating Trump and Musk

Democrats expect to use their new majority to conduct oversight, and they will have subpoena power when they enter the majority. The frustrated letters they have sent to the administration over the past two years will turn into demands and hearings.

"Lawyer up," Rep. Robert Garcia (D., Calif.), the likely chairman of the House Oversight Committee, said late Tuesday. Sen. Ron Wyden (D., Ore.), who would become chairman of the Finance Committee, tweeted a single word: "Subpoenas."

They are likely to investigate Trump's cryptocurrency dealings, his family's business ties, his construction projects in Washington, D.C., his acceptance of a Qatari jet, the tax-immunity deal he struck with his own administration and many other controversial subjects that Republican lawmakers haven't examined.

Elon Musk, the Trump-allied billionaire who led a government-reduction effort early in the administration, is also likely to get scrutiny, particularly for his involvement in slower Starlink speeds that impaired Ukrainian war activity.

Lawmakers have taken mixed stances on impeaching Trump, after neither of his first-term impeachments yielded a conviction and removal. But they have their eyes set on impeaching other administration officials, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Getting tougher on AI regulation

Democrats also are likely to focus on artificial intelligence by bringing in top executives to testify about their close relationships with the White House and pushing for the first federal regulations setting guardrails for new models. AI regulation has become more of a priority for many lawmakers after a wave of hacks by recent models and warnings from industry researchers that the rapidly evolving technology could be capable of destroying humanity within the next decade.

Progressives have also proposed bills targeting the data centers underpinning the AI boom, hoping to curtail their power usage and address a recent backlash that swept across the country.

Tackling war and tariffs

Trump's two main unilateral initiatives—the Iran war and the tariff expansion—helped push prices up and propel Democrats to victory.

"We do have to look at every available legislative mean in order to do what the American people want us to do, which is bring an end to this reckless, unnecessary war," Jeffries said in a recent television interview.

But stopping the war or reversing the tariffs will be difficult because of Trump's national-security powers, his ability to veto legislation and his support among Republicans. Democrats could attempt to use Congress's power of the purse, restricting funding for Trump initiatives they oppose. But they would have to risk government shutdowns or criticism that they're harming the troops.

Looking at Social Security, blocking nominees

Social Security is heading toward insolvency in 2032, and Democrats may take a shot at legislation that would stave off the automatic benefit cuts that would bring. Many of them favor raising the earnings cap—now $184,500—where payroll taxes stop.

Jeffries has talked about expanding the low-income housing tax credit, the earned-income tax credit and the child tax credit.

With Senate control, Democrats will be able to block Trump's judicial and executive-branch nominees, including any Supreme Court picks. Republicans will likely push through as many confirmations as possible before they lose power Jan. 3. But once vacancies emerge, the partisan divide will either mean acting officials in key administration positions or compromise nominees who can satisfy Democrats.

There are potential areas of compromise between Trump and Democrats, including support for farmers, a tax credit for film production and an overhaul of permitting rules for major projects.

Wrangling over must-pass bills

Conflict is likely over must-pass legislation. Government funding is scheduled to lapse in mid-December. And Congress also must raise the debt limit by some time in 2027. If those fundamental tasks don't get done under Republican majorities in the next two months of the lame-duck Congress, Trump and Democrats will have to figure out a path forward.

Beyond disputes over the amounts of funding, Democrats have been frustrated by the administration's actions to rescind or change spending levels approved by Congress. In the spending-bill fights, they may seek additional guardrails to prevent Trump and budget director Russell Vought from sidestepping Congress, either by refusing to use money directed by Congress or by spending funds that Congress didn't approve.

The must-pass bills could also become the fighting ground for Democrats' demands on the Iran war, tariffs and other issues where they're seeking leverage over Trump. During Trump's first term, right after Democrats won the House in the 2018 election, Trump triggered a government shutdown by insisting that Congress include border-wall funding in a must-pass spending bill.

Yiannis Kottis: How His Mother's Stuffed Vegetables Changed His Painting

The painter talks about Moralis, Paris, and the images from Corinth to Hydra he carries with him

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"The materiality," I offer. He looks at me, puzzled. I explain that I mean his rough, heavily textured impasto. "The matière, as they say," he corrects me. From there, the conversation turns to his father, who was a plasterer. Kottis constantly returns to what he knows through his hands and his memory. Even when... In the end, I stop asking for photographs without trees.

Looking at his works, it occurs to me how easily we fall into the habit of attaching the "Greekness" label to painting that's full of trees and fruit, animals and familiar landscapes. In Kottis's case, however, the definition is simply insufficient. There is the memory of a place, certainly, but there is also the distance from it, the years abroad, the insistence on hard, physical work, and even the refusal to deem the ordinary any less interesting than the modern. These are the threads I attempted to follow in our conversation. A man's journey toward discovering his own way of seeing this world.

You grew up in Kokkoni, Corinth; what's stayed with you from those early years?

My father was a plasterer, as were my two brothers. He would take me along with him from a young age, so I wouldn't become a layabout, as he used to say. I fetched water, helped out. It was not ideal for a child, but I learned how to work, and how to work with others. I still feel guilty if I'm not working.

When did you realize you wanted to paint?

It didn't happen suddenly; it was an instinct. I remember a calendar with works by Spyros Vassiliou that I really liked. I didn't get into the School of Fine Arts the first time I tried—I'd gone entirely unprepared. That's how I found myself at the Doxiadis School. The graphic arts seemed too technical to me, but when I painted, I felt I was in my element.

What did Nikos Nikolaou and Yiannis Moralis teach you?

Nikolaou would send us out to paint in the open air. I'd go to Larisis Station and paint a train. He used to say that you didn't need a beautiful landscape, just a good spot to sit. Moralis was extremely methodical. He'd sit beside us, teaching us composition, color and technique. He taught us the hands-on, craft aspect of our art. He loved his students, too, attending their exhibitions and helping them out when he could.

Your scholarship took you to Paris; did you want to leave?

Not especially. Moving from Kokkoni to Athens was already a massive step. But in France, I saw museums, exhibitions, other painters. Your fellow students would tell you, "go see this," and you learned from it. At that time, we didn't have as many opportunities here in Greece.

And how did you find your personal idiom when you were over there?

I know this will sound funny, but it's true. I was in the studio one day, when I suddenly remembered my mother's stuffed tomatoes and zucchini. And I said to myself, "that's what I'll do." The trees of Corinthia, the nature I grew up with, followed on from that. I liked Bonnard and Matisse, but I had to paint what I knew and what made me happy.

Was there also an element of nostalgia in this return to Greek imagery?

Perhaps. We would come back from Paris by coach, a two-day journey, and I was happy I'd get to see my homeland again and speak my language. I loved France too, but there are images you carry with you from childhood.

What did your distinction at the Salon de Montrouge in 1984 mean to you?

It was a good salon, difficult to get into. But it wasn't something that changed my life. I was interested in working, in painting. Even major exhibitions require so much organization—getting the works together, finding them. I prefer the studio.

Why do bicycles appear so frequently in your paintings?

When I was a child, I desperately wanted a bicycle so I could get from Kokkoni to Velo. Those were difficult years, and it was my dream. It wasn't that I wanted to create a nice motif; bicycles were something I'd loved.

Is the matière of your works connected to your father's trade?



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PANOS KOUGIAS/TO BHMA INTL EDITION

Painter Yiannis Kottis poses next to a few of his artworks in his atelier.



One of Yiannis Kottis' famous pomegranate trees.

It could be. My father worked with surfaces like that. Perhaps something stuck. I have tried painting a smoother canvas, without matière, but it doesn't work for me. As soon as I add a little more paint, something happens.

Your landscapes do not always correspond to recognizable places. Is that a conscious choice?

Yes, that's exactly what I want. For the viewer not to know the location of what they're looking at. It might have elements from Corinthia, others from France, a storm, animals running. All of which comes out differently. I want my works to have something otherworldly about them. They take on a metaphysical quality.

What connects you so deeply to Hydra?

I first visited when I was a student. I was captivated. Hydra isn't just the harbor everyone is familiar with. It has wonderful places higher up, behind the settlement. Later on, we acquired a house there. But just because I paint a mule doesn't mean I'm painting Hydra. I do not like folkloric readings like that.

Your paintings have also circulated widely as silkscreen prints. How do you feel about this sort of reproduction?

It doesn't bother me. People asked to turn works of mine into silkscreens, and I said yes. Sometimes, I didn't even ask for money. I liked that my work could reach more homes and people who would never buy a large painting.

What's your take on recurrent themes in painting?

Fassianos used to say that what you do must bring you joy. I agree. So you can return to a subject, just as long as you enjoy your work. If you only paint for fashion or celebrity, what's the point?

What advice would you give a young person studying painting today?

I'd tell them to work at it. To learn drawing first, the basics, and then do whatever they want. I'd say they need to focus and delve deeper. And to know where you come from. If you don't put your lived experiences to work, what you produce will be fake. Do whatever you want, as long as it is yours.